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Elements of the French position on nuclear deterrence

Working paper submitted by the delegation of France

The French delegation wishes to inform the Disarmament Commission of the elements of its position on French nuclear deterrence policy as outlined in the recent statement by the President of the French Republic on 19 January 2006 at Ile Longue:

> "For France, the creation of a national deterrent force was a real challenge that we were able to meet only thanks to commitment on everyone's part. It called for the mobilization of all forces, the development of our research capabilities and efforts to find innovative solutions to all kinds of technical problems. Nuclear deterrence thus became the very image of what our country is capable of producing when it has set itself a task and holds to it.
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> "I wish to pay tribute here to the researchers and engineers, from the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) and all French companies, who enable us to remain at the forefront in vital sectors such as materials sciences, digital simulation, lasers — in particular the megajoule laser — and nuclear and space technologies. I would like to extend this tribute to all those who support our nuclear forces in one way or another: the staff of the Defence Ministry's General Delegation for Armaments (DGA), executives and workers in partner industrial companies and groups, the gendarmerie protecting nuclear facilities and personnel from all the services. I am of course thinking first and foremost of the crews of the maritime and airborne components, who carry out the longest and most important of the operational missions continuously and with the utmost discretion. I know that I have set a demanding requirement; but it is commensurate with our country's security requirements. I am aware of the constraints it imposes. You are seldom in the limelight, but I wish to pay tribute to your exceptional qualities and your very great merit. The permanence of the deterrent, which has been remarkably upheld for 40 years, itself serves as the highest praise.

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"I wish to extend this tribute to your families, and more particularly those of submarine crews. I am very much aware of what operational patrols involve in terms of absence from home, solitude and sometimes suffering. You are conducting this mission in a constantly changing environment.

"It is true that, with the end of the cold war, we are currently under no direct threat from a major Power.

"But the end of the bipolar world has not done away with threats to peace. In many countries radical ideas are being spread which advocate confrontation between civilizations, cultures and religions. Today, this desire for confrontation translates into odious attacks which regularly remind us that fanaticism and intolerance are the source of all kinds of madness. Tomorrow, it may take even more serious forms, possibly involving States.

"Combating terrorism is one of our priorities. We have adopted numerous measures to address this danger. We will continue in this direction firmly and resolutely, but one should not yield to the temptation to restrict all defence and security-related consideration to this necessary fight against terrorism. The emergence of a new threat does not remove all the others.

"Our world is constantly changing and searching for new political, economic, demographic and military equilibria. It is characterized by the swift emergence of new poles of power. It is confronted with new sources of imbalance, in particular the sharing of raw materials, the distribution of natural resources, and changing demographic equilibria. These changes could result in instability, especially if they are accompanied by rising nationalisms.

"That the relationship between the different poles of power should sink into hostility in the near future is no foregone conclusion. To avert this danger, we must work towards establishing an international order based on the rule of law and collective security, on a fairer and more representative order. We must also urge all our major partners to opt for cooperation rather than confrontation. However, we are not safe from an unexpected upset in the international system, nor from a strategic surprise. All of our history teaches us this lesson.

"Our world is also marked by assertions of power based on the possession of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. Hence the temptation for certain States to acquire nuclear capabilities, in breach of treaties. Tests of ballistic missiles with ever-greater range are on the increase worldwide. This led the United Nations Security Council to acknowledge that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery constituted a real threat to peace and international security. Finally, the persistence of more traditional risks of regional instability should not be ignored. There are risks of this kind everywhere in the world, unfortunately.

"In the face of crises that are shaking the world, in the face of the new threats, France has always chosen the path of prevention first of all. Prevention remains in all its forms the very foundation of our defence policy. Relying on the rule of law, influence and solidarity, prevention is central to the set of actions conducted by our diplomacy, which constantly strives to resolve crises that may arise here and there. Prevention also involves a whole range of

defence and security postures, foremost among which are pre-positioned forces.

"But believing that prevention alone is enough to protect us would be naively optimistic. To make ourselves heard, we must also be capable of using force when necessary. We must therefore have a substantial capability to intervene outside our borders, with conventional means, in order to support and supplement this strategy.

"Such a defence policy rests on the certainty that, whatever happens, our vital interests will remain safeguarded.

"This is the role assigned to nuclear deterrence, which directly stems from our prevention strategy and constitutes its ultimate expression. In the face of the concerns of the present and the uncertainties of the future, nuclear deterrence remains the fundamental guarantee of our security. Wherever the pressure may come from, it also enables us to be in control of our actions, our policies, the durability of our democratic values.

"At the same time, we continue to support international efforts to promote general and complete disarmament and, in particular, the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty. But we can of course progress along the road to disarmament only if the conditions for our global security are maintained and if the will to make headway is shared unanimously.

"It is in this spirit that France has maintained its deterrent forces, while reducing them, in accordance with the spirit of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the principle of strict sufficiency.

"It is the responsibility of the head of State to continuously assess the limits of our vital interests. Maintaining uncertainty as to these limits is consubstantial with the doctrine of deterrence. The integrity of our territory, the protection of our population, the free exercise of our sovereignty will always be the core of our vital interests. But our interests are not limited to these elements. The perception of these interests is changing as the world changes, a world marked by the growing interdependence of European countries and also by the impact of globalization. For example, safeguarding our strategic supplies or the defence of our allies are among the interests that must be protected. Assessing the scale and potential consequences of an unacceptable act of aggression, threat or blackmail perpetrated against these interests is the responsibility of the President of the Republic. This analysis could, in some cases, lead to a judgement that these situations fall within the scope of our vital interests. As I emphasized immediately after the attacks of 11 September 2001, nuclear deterrence is not intended to deter fanatical terrorists. Yet the leaders of States who contemplate terrorist attacks against us, as well as those who might consider using weapons of mass destruction in one way or another, must understand that they would lay themselves open to a firm and appropriate response on our part. And this response could be a conventional one. It could also be of another kind.

"From the beginning, both the spirit of deterrence and the means available have continuously adapted themselves to our environment and to the threat analysis to which I have just referred. We are in a position to inflict damage of any kind on any major Power that sought to attack interests we

would regard as vital. Against a regional Power, our choice would not be between inaction and annihilation. The flexibility and responsiveness of our strategic forces would enable us to respond directly against its centres of power and its capacity to act. All our nuclear forces have been configured accordingly. It is for this purpose, for example, that the number of nuclear warheads on some of the missiles in our submarines has been reduced.

"However, our approach to the use of nuclear weapons remains unchanged. There is no question, under any circumstances, of using nuclear means for military purposes during a conflict. It is in the spirit that the nuclear forces are sometimes referred to as "weapons of non-use". This formula should not, however, allow any doubts to persist about our determination and capacity to resort to our nuclear weapons. The credible threat of their utilization permanently hangs over those leaders who harbour hostile intentions against us. It is essential for making them see reason, making them aware of the disproportionate cost their actions would entail for themselves and their States. It goes without saying that we always reserve the right to resort to a final warning to mark our determination to safeguard our vital interests.

"Thus the principles underlying our doctrine of deterrence remain unchanged. But the manner in which it is expressed has evolved and continues to evolve, so as to enable us to address the context of the twenty-first century.

"The capabilities of the maritime and airborne components, constantly adapted to their new missions, enable us to match a coherent response to our concerns. Thanks to these two components, which are distinct but complement one another, the head of State has a wide range of options which over all identified threats.

"Modernizing and adapting these capabilities is thus absolutely necessary. Our deterrent must retain its indispensable credibility in an evolving geographical environment.

"It would be irresponsible to imagine that maintaining our arsenal in its current state might, after all, be sufficient. How credible would our deterrent be if it did not allow us to respond to new situations? What credibility would it have vis-à-vis regional Powers if we strictly confined ourselves to threatening total destruction? What credibility would ballistic weapons with limited range have in the future? The M51 ballistic missile, for example, thanks to its intercontinental range, and the improved air-to-ground medium-range missile system (ASMPA), will, in a volatile world, give us the means to cover threats wherever they arise and whatever their nature. Likewise, no one can contend that missile defence is sufficient to counter the threat of ballistic missiles. No defensive system, however sophisticated, can be 100 per cent effective. We can never be assured that it cannot be circumvented. Basing all our defence on this capability alone would in actual fact prompt our adversaries to find other means to use their nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. Consequently, such a tool cannot be considered a substitute for deterrence. But it can supplement deterrence by reducing our vulnerabilities. This is why France has resolutely embarked on a joint review process within the Atlantic Alliance, and is developing its own programme for the self-protection of deployed forces.

"Our country's security and independence come at a price. Forty years ago, the Defence Ministry devoted 50 per cent of its investment to nuclear forces. This share has since been steadily reduced, and is expected to account for no more than 18 per cent of investment in 2008. Today, in accordance with its trademark spirit of strict sufficiency, our deterrence policy accounts overall for less than 10 per cent of the total defence budget. Defence appropriations dedicated to deterrence go to leading-edge technologies and provide extensive and key support for our country's scientific, technological and industrial research efforts.

"Ten per cent of our defence effort is a fair and sufficient price to pay to provide our country with a credible and sustainable assurance of security. And I assure you that calling this into question would be utterly irresponsible.

"Moreover, the development of the European Security and Defence Policy, the growing interweaving of the interests of European Union countries and the solidarity that now exists between them make the French nuclear deterrent, by its very existence, an indispensable element in the security of the European continent. In 1995, France put forward the ambitious idea of concerted deterrence in order to launch a debate at European level on this issue. I still believe that, when the time comes, we shall have to raise the question of a common defence that would take account of existing deterrent forces, with a view to a strong Europe which assumes responsibility for its own security. Indeed, the countries of the Union have begun to reflect together on what are, or will be, their common security interests. And I would like this process to become more far-reaching. This is a first and necessary step.

"Since 1964, France has had an autonomous nuclear deterrent. The lessons of history led General de Gaulle to make this crucial choice. Throughout these years, the French nuclear forces have ensured our country's defence and greatly helped to keep the peace. Today, they remain silently watchful, so that we can live in a land of freedom which is master of its future and its destiny. They continue, and will continue, to be the ultimate guarantor of our security.

"In my capacity as head of the armed forces, and on behalf of the French people, I would like to express the nation's appreciation and gratitude to all the women and men who contribute to this essential mission."

The French delegation wished to communicate these elements to the Disarmament Commission, thereby enabling its members to be fully and specifically informed of them.